



WHEN THE UNIT RETURNS



REUNION

Reunion is a time of readjustment after separation, whether long or short, planned or unplanned.

Reunion can be both joyful and stressful as it is a major change that affects everyone.

It is a good idea to avoid tight schedules and to allow time to adjust. Understand the soldier's discomfort and often-severe fatigue. Expect unusual feelings.

Make it easier for children by:

- Giving them time, too.
- Expecting them to test limits.
- Planning family time.
- Planning individual time with returning parent.
- Staying involved with school, activities and interests of the child.

Make reunion easier for yourself and your spouse by considering expectations:

- Do not expect things to be perfect after reunion.
- Allow time.
- Be understanding and enjoy each other's company as much as possible.
- Remember that open, honest communications can help solve any problems or conflicts.
- Plan to discuss family roles and responsibilities until they are clearly defined.

POST DEPLOYMENT STRESS

Homecoming and reunion of soldiers, friends, and family has its own brand of stress.

- Talk openly about problems.
- Find people who can help with emotional support and day-today problem solving (friends, chaplain, social workers).
- Cut big problems into smaller parts and use the step-by-step approach-look for solutions.
- Join social activities (religious, hobby, sports, duos, etc.).
- Accept some setbacks (emotional, financial, physical, or job-related).
- Avoid excessive self-blame for readjustment problems.
- Do not use alcohol or drugs to escape or forget about problems.

EXPECTATIONS FOR SOLDIERS

- You may want to talk about what you saw and did. Others may seem not to want listen. Or you may not want to talk about it when others keep asking.
- You may miss the excitement of the deployment for a while.
- Some things may have changed while you were gone.
- Roles may have changed to manage basic household chores.
- Face to face communication may be hard at first.
- Sexual closeness may also be awkward at first.
- Children have grown and may be different in many ways.
- Spouses may have become more independent and learned new coping skills.
- Spouses may have new friends and support systems.
- You may have changed in your outlook and priorities in life.

TIPS FOR SOLDIERS:

- Support good things your family has done.
- Take time to talk with your spouse and children.
- Make individual time for each child and your spouse.
- Go slowly when re-establishing your place in the family.
- Be prepared to make some adjustments.
- Make your savings last longer.
- Take time to listen and to talk with loved ones.
- Go easy on partying.

EXPECTATIONS FOR SPOUSES:

- Soldiers may have changed.
- Soldiers, used to the open spaces of the field may feel closed in.
- Soldiers, also may be overwhelmed by noise and confusion of home life.
- Soldiers may be on a different schedule of sleeping and eating (jet lag).
- Soldiers may wonder if they still fit into the family.
- Soldiers may want to take back all the responsibilities they had before they left.
- Soldiers may feel hurt when young children are slow to hug them.

TIPS FOR SPOUSES FOR REUNION:

- Avoid scheduling too many things.
- Go slowly in making adjustments.
- You and your soldier may need time for yourself.
- Remind soldier they're still needed in the family.
- Discuss splitting up family chores.
- Stick to your budget until you've had time to talk it through.
- Along with time for the family, make individual time to talk.
- Be patient with yourself and your partner.

WHAT CHILDREN MAY FEEL:

- Babies less than 1 year old may not know you and may cry when held.
- Toddlers (1-3 years) may hide from you and be slow to come to you.
- Preschoolers (3-5 yrs) may feel guilty over the separation and be scared.
- School age (6-12 yrs) may want a lot of your time and attention.
- Teen-agers (13-18 yrs) may be moody and may appear not to care.
- Any age may feel guilty about not living up to your standards.
- Some may fear your return (*Wait until mommy/daddy gets home!*).
- Some may feel torn by loyalties to the spouse who remained.

TIPS FOR REUNION WITH CHILDREN:

- Go slowly. Adapt to the rules and routines already in place.
- Learn from how your spouse manages the children.
- Be available to your child, both with time and with your emotions.
- Let the child set the pace for getting to know you again.
- Delay making changes in rules and routines for a few weeks.
- Expect the family will not be the same as before you left; everyone has changed.
- Focus on successes with your children; limit your criticisms.
- Encourage children to tell you about what happened during the separation.
- Make individual time for each child and your spouse.

Deployment & Reunion (Children and Separation)

Children are always affected by the soldier's absence. They can sense when the parents are upset and when they are calm. They often test the spouse as soon as the soldier leaves to find out if they will bend more when the soldier is gone. They will also test the soldier when he returns to see if they'll bend.

Consistency is important with children. Be consistent with their discipline. Don't threaten the children about what is going to happen when the soldier returns home.

When the soldier returns, children behave in a variety of ways, including hugs and kisses, but also with feelings of hurt, anger, and hostility. When the soldier is gone, children often become the main focus of the spouse. When the soldier returns, they often feel they are not "number one" anymore.

Before deployment, both the soldier and spouse should spend time explaining, at the child's level, why the soldier is leaving, with whom, and how long they will be gone. The departing parent should spend time individually with each child before they deploy.

During deployment, display pictures of the missing parent at the kid's eye level. Let each child have a picture of him or herself with the soldier in their room. Routine is important. Keep the same rules and family schedule. But, make opportunities for special outings, especially on weekends and holidays when both parents would usually have been home. Encourage them to write letters and enclose schoolwork or drawings.

Make homecoming a family reunion. Mom and Dad can vacation alone later. Expect some anger and insecurity from the kids. The returning soldier should set aside a date with each child to reestablish the relationship. Spend as much time as possible as a family, without outsiders, at the beginning. Postpone visits with relatives and friends for a few days.